

# How to Make Cover Letters Less Painful

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**CENTRE FOR CAREER ACTION**



# NIMISH SARDANA (He/Him)



- Career Leader, Workshop Facilitator @ Centre for Career Action
- Meng , ECE
- <https://www.linkedin.com/in/nimish-sardana-8381021a6/>
- Fun fact: I love swimming and Field hockey



# WHOSE LAND ARE WE ON?

The University of Waterloo acknowledges that much of our work takes place on the traditional territory of the Neutral, Anishinaabeg and Haudenosaunee peoples. Our main campus is situated on the Haldimand Tract, the land granted to the Six Nations that includes six miles on each side of the Grand River. Our active work toward reconciliation takes place across our campuses through research, learning, teaching, and community building, and is coordinated within the Office of Indigenous Relations.

June is Indigenous history month!  
Upcoming presentation: June 20  
[On Land and Territorial Acknowledgements](#)



# What to Expect



- Principles of curiosity, care and respect
- Take things at your own pace and participate in a way that works for you: everything is optional
- Ask questions throughout! Via the chat or direct message
- Q & A at the end
- Take what works for you, leave what doesn't

# CHECKING IN!



*Sending off my cover letter!*

**Share in the chat, if you're comfortable!**

- Your academic program, year
- A GIF that captures how you feel about cover letters!

# Today's Agenda

1. Cover letter myth-busting
2. (Why) do I need a cover letter?
3. How to write a cover letter
4. What are the skills employers are looking for?
5. Going from skills identification to articulation
6. Q&A



# **Cover Letter Myth-Busting**

# Common Cover Letter Misconceptions

- Cover Letters are replicas of resumes
- Employers don't read cover letters
- Cover letters are time consuming
- Cover letters are a waste of my time



Stock photo from npr.org



# **(Why) Do I Need A Cover Letter?**

# The function of a cover letter



- Cover letter = bridge between resume and interview
- A place to...
  - Demonstrate your interest in the role
  - Go into detail! (Skills, experiences, etc.)
  - Explain things – if you want to
  - Show you've done your research

# Prioritizing job applications

## Job Applications

### High priority

Jobs that align very well with my interests/career goals

### Mid-priority

Jobs that are appealing but not in complete alignment with my interests/career goals

### Low priority

Jobs in minimal alignment with my interests/career goals

- When should I submit a cover letter?
- How much time should I invest tailoring my cover letter?
- Is it OK to submit a generic cover letter?

# How does a cover letter benefit YOU?



- Ensures job fit
  - If you can't make your cover letter sound enthusiastic, should you be applying?
- Articulates your career story
  - Helps us self-reflect & articulate our story across contexts (e.g. interviews, LinkedIn)
- Creates future opportunities
  - Deepen your understanding of the sector

# **HOW TO WRITE A COVER LETTER**

## **EYE-CATCHING COVER LETTERS**

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What are some things we can do to make our  
cover letters stand out?

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PLEASE USE THE CHAT OR UNMUTE TO SHARE.

P.S. THERE ARE NO RIGHT OR WRONG  
ANSWERS!

# Let's talk strategy...

## **STEP 1: Review the job description**

- Reflect on 2-3 reasons you want the job
- Highlight key words / skills
- Pay attention to tone

## **STEP 2: Research!**

- Learn more about company: values, mission, etc.
- Consider scheduling an informational interview (informal chat with someone in the industry)

## **STEP 3: Start writing!**

- Tailor the cover letter based on priority and capacity

# Cover Letter Structure

## ❑ Opening

- ❑ Summarize how values/experience align with the company's requirements/mission
- ❑ Show enthusiasm by highlighting your reasons for applying
- ❑ Name the job you're applying to and how you found out about it

## ❑ Body

- ❑ 2-3 specific examples of why you're a good fit for the job
- ❑ Use key words from job posting

## ❑ Closing

- ❑ Reiterate your reason for applying
- ❑ Refer to your enclosed resume and provide contact information to follow-up



## Your Name & Contact Information

 **John Doe**  
VP, Finance & Operations  
john.doe@gmail.com  
416-821-9879  
Toronto, Canada  
linkedin.com/in/john.doe  
john.doe

To: Doris Johnson  
Human Resources Manager  
Optimal Workplace Inc. 321  
Employment Avenue. Toronto,  
Canada  
21 September, 2018

## Name & Address of Recipient

## Date

## Salutation

Dear Ms. Johnson,

## Opening

As the Vice-President of Finance and Operations at a national food chain, I bring proven success in enhancing productivity and gaining an advantage when it comes to profit margins. My work spans companies and business units at varying stages of growth, from start-up to multinational organizations.

## Body

With over 20 years of achieving profitability and long-term growth, I seek to monitor budgets and sales numbers closely to identify areas for improvement. I am known for enhancing performance through technology upgrades, implementing best practices, and improving employee training protocols.

Examples of my achievements include:

- Drove successful launch of start-up organization through contemporary hiring practices, defining product implementation, and developing go-to-market strategies to achieve 50% margins and \$15M+ revenue within my first three years.
- Managed daily operations of a \$100M+ consumer goods department that introduced complete line of products to the U.S. and Canada, improving profit margins by 14%.
- Proved a vital team member that conducted a complete leadership reorganization resulted in a 10% improvement in productivity within the sales department and a 15% improvement within the technical team.

## Closing

As a skilled professional with a CPA degree and a background in analyzing and improving sales numbers, I am confident I will prove an asset to your company and respectfully submit my application for your review. I would like to request a meeting to discuss how I can help meet your goals. I am available at your convenience and hope to hear from you soon.

Thank you for your consideration.

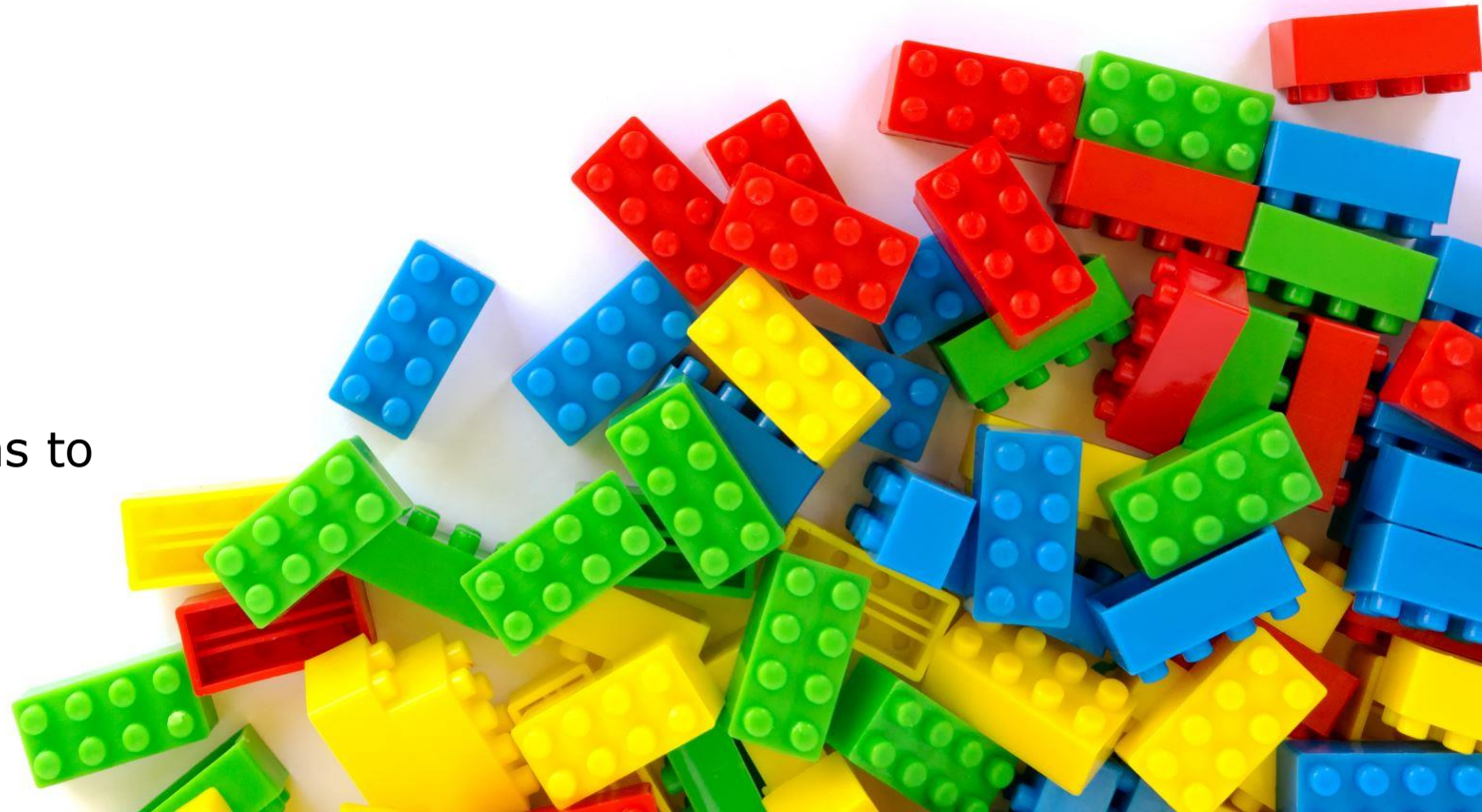
Sincerely,  
John Doe

## Respects & Your Name

# Cover Letter Structure

# Smart tailoring

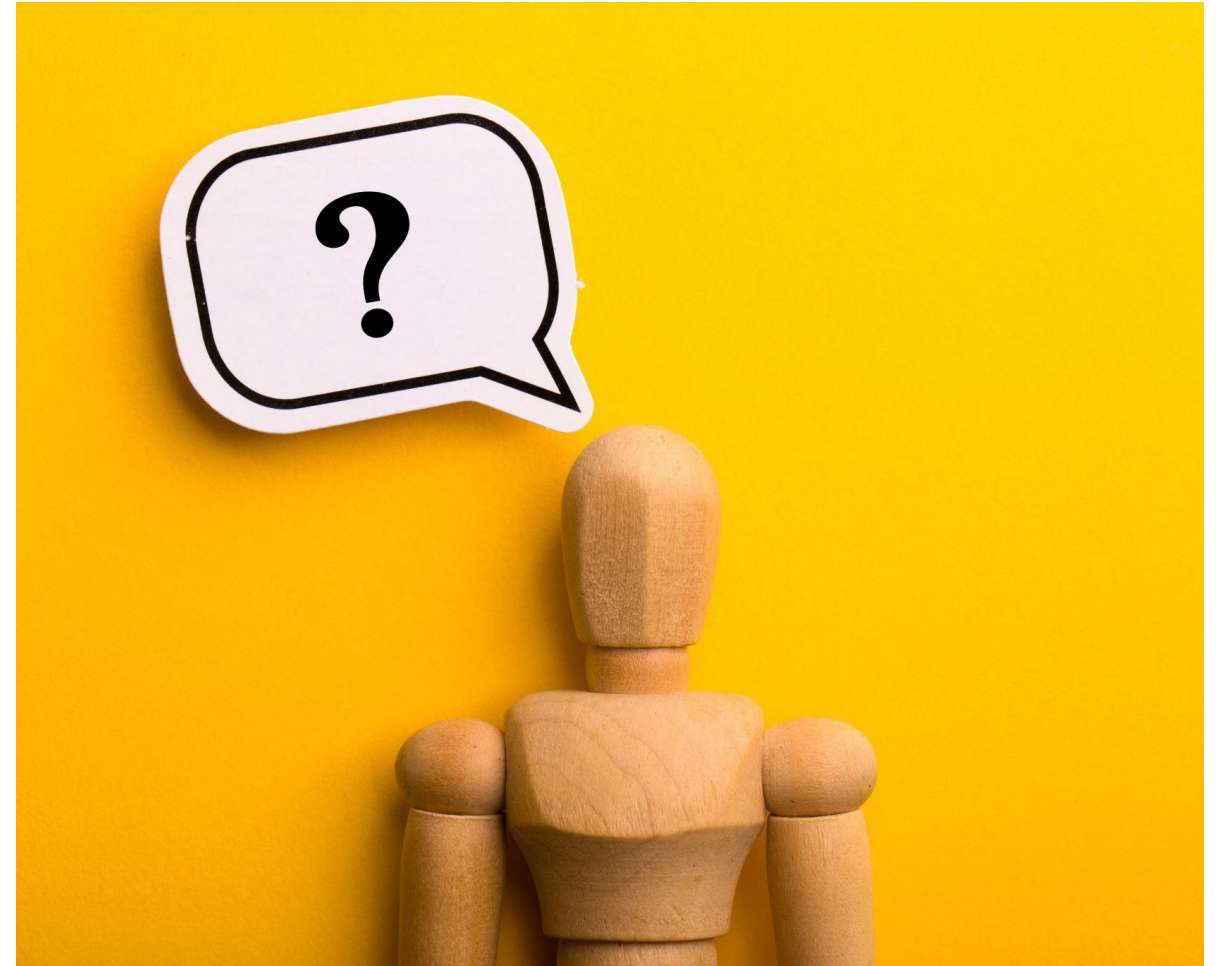
- Don't write every cover letter from scratch!
- Look for patterns and recurring key works in job postings
- Try out the Lego approach:
  - Paragraphs = building blocks
  - Swap out the opening and closing paragraphs
  - Prepare multiple middle paragraphs to pick and choose from



**WHAT ARE THE SKILLS  
EMPLOYERS ARE LOOKING FOR?**

# Making Your Case

- Why are you a match for the job?
  - Identify the employer's "wish list"
  - Identify your skills & experiences
  - Create a table if it helps!



# Identify Required Skills

**What required skills can you identify?**

## **Library Shelver – Job Posting**

We're looking for individuals with exceptional eyes for detail to step into the inner workings of our library system. At WPL, Shelves play an important role in our day-to-day operations with their knack for process, friendly faces, and their ability to keep things impeccably neat and tidy allow our customers have a superb library experience.

# Identify Required skills

What you'll do:

- Use automated sorter to check in and sort materials
- Shelve materials in the library according to the Dewey Decimal System
- Maintain a tidy library space
- Be a friendly face to customers by responding to basic questions and referring them to our staff

What we're looking for:

- Highly detail-oriented individuals with a flair for neatness and organization
- Warm and friendly personalities who keep the customer always in mind
- Responsible and dependable individuals that can work with minimal supervision
- People who enjoy a job with both physical and mental demands

# Match your experience with required skills

Job requirement	Evidence that I meet them
Attention to detail	Citing research
Warm and friendly	Teaching assistant
Physical and mental demands	UWaterloo swim team member
Minimal supervision / dependable	Independent research
Neat and tidy	Organizing books and journals

# How can we improve this middle paragraph?

“As a graduate student, I have the interpersonal skills necessary for this job. As a member of the swim team, I also have the abilities needed to physically carry and shelve materials. Having worked as a content writer with marketing experience, a major portion of my work involved writing articles and reports as well as managing meetings with clients situated in Australia, Europe, UK and the US, so I have the communication skills needed for this position as well.”

**Key words:** attention to detail, neat and tidy, physical and mental demands, responsible and dependable, minimal supervision, warm and friendly personality



# Improved version

“My experience as a graduate student at the University of Waterloo has equipped me with the skills needed to be a dependable member of the shelving team. In my independent research, I need to stay organized with all the books and journals I reference and pay detailed attention to the current research in my field – all with minimal supervision. As a teaching assistant, I also support 25+ students every term with their coursework. My teaching evaluations indicate that my warm and friendly personality makes students feel comfortable approaching me with questions and concerns. I believe these interpersonal skills will be an asset in this customer-facing role.”

**Key words:** attention to detail, neat and tidy, physical and mental demands, responsible and dependable, minimal supervision, warm and friendly personality

# **GOING FROM IDENTIFICATION TO ARTICULATION**

How can you prove that you have these skills?

# The Body Paragraph



- Show don't tell
- Use specific examples!
- Use S.T.A.R. approach to structure examples
  - **S**ituation (What, when who, why, where?)
  - **T**ask (what action did you take?)
  - **A**ction (What skills did you use?)
  - **R**esult (What was the outcome?)

## WHAT'S MISSING?

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“I am able to work effectively as part of a team.”

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PLEASE USE THE CHAT OR UNMUTE TO SHARE.

P.S. THERE ARE NO RIGHT OR WRONG  
ANSWERS!

# Show Don't Tell!

## Telling

“I am able to work effectively as part of a team.”

## Showing

<b>Situation</b>	In my mechanical engineering class this year,
<b>Task</b>	I was required to collaborate with my peers on building a functional robot.
<b>Action</b>	As team lead, I leveraged my project management skills to delegate tasks as well as my communication skills to resolve inter-personal conflicts.
<b>Result</b>	We received top marks and our prototype will be used as an example for future classes.

# **TAKEAWAYS**

# Key Takeaways

- Employers are busy – make your cover letter stand out!
- The process of writing cover letters benefits YOU
- Tailor your cover letters – efficiently!
- Study the job description carefully
  - Match your skills/experience with what they're looking for!
- Show don't tell
  - Use the S.T.A.R. model

# **Supports & Resources**

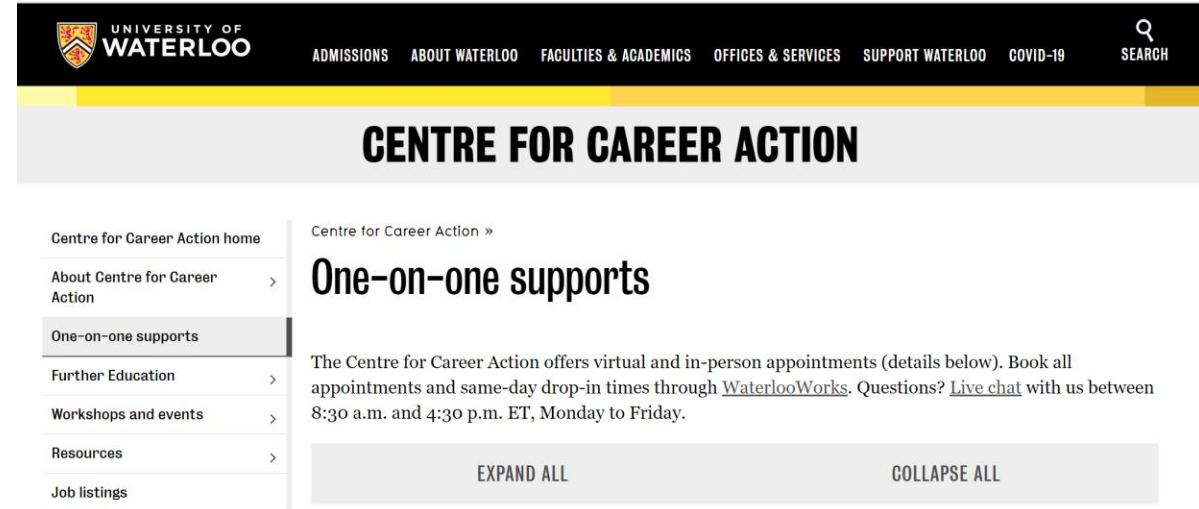


# A note on safety and disclosure in cover letters

- **Social safety:** you can share, but you don't have to share
- **Emotional safety:** what is coming up for you when writing this cover letter?
- **Accommodations:** can be requested through the company's Human Resources department
- Protected grounds from the **Ontario Human Rights Code:**
  - "Age, Ancestry, Colour, Race, Citizenship, Ethnic Origin, Place of Origin, Creed, Disability, Family Status, Marital Status, Gender Identity, Gender Expression, Receipt of public Assistance, Record of Offences, Sex, Sexual Orientation" The Ontario Human Rights Code | Ontario Human Rights Commission (ohrc.on.ca)

# Additional Support

- Visit the Centre for Career Action (virtually or in-person) for one-on-one support with your job search and application documents, including **cover letters**
- Same day 20-minute drop-ins
- 30-minute cover letter appointments
- <https://uwaterloo.ca/career-action/one-one-supports>



The screenshot shows the website header for the University of Waterloo, with navigation links for Admissions, About Waterloo, Faculties & Academics, Offices & Services, Support Waterloo, and COVID-19. The main heading is "CENTRE FOR CAREER ACTION". A left sidebar menu includes links for "Centre for Career Action home", "About Centre for Career Action", "One-on-one supports" (which is highlighted), "Further Education", "Workshops and events", "Resources", and "Job listings". The main content area features the heading "One-on-one supports" and a paragraph stating: "The Centre for Career Action offers virtual and in-person appointments (details below). Book all appointments and same-day drop-in times through [WaterlooWorks](#). Questions? [Live chat](#) with us between 8:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. ET, Monday to Friday." Below the text are two buttons: "EXPAND ALL" and "COLLAPSE ALL".

**Questions?**

# Thank you! Any questions or comments?

- What has come up for you during this workshop?
- Feel free to go mic on to ask questions, or use the chat feature in Zoom
- Please don't hesitate to reach out!



# UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO



**YOU+WATERLOO**

*Our greatest impact happens together.*